
ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

THE District of Columbia is the reserve of land, ten miles square, which is appropriated to Federal occupation, and is under Federal government exclusively. Slavery there once *was* a national institution : whereas everywhere else it *is* a State institution. While it existed there, the whole power and influence of the general government was at the service of the slaveholding portion of the nation ; and now that it is extinguished there, the slaveholders must take charge of their own " domestic institution," as they are fond of calling it. There are no two opinions anywhere, I believe, as to the inability of slavery to sustain itself in the hands of only a quarter of a million of proprietors, who have no longer the support of the national government, but must sustain themselves against the jealousy of four times their own number of their own non-slaveholding neighbours, and the public opinion of the rest of the nation. Time will show whether the attempt will be made to preserve the institution against such odds. Meanwhile its foundation is rooted up ; there is no longer any controversy on this subject involved in the inter-

national relations of the Republic; and the African race has turned the corner of its fate. American statesmen have for many years looked forward to this event as that which would be the doom of Cuban slavery. When their government should at length be at liberty to join ours in inducing Spain to unite with the rest of Christendom in repudiating slavery, there could be no doubt of its speedy disappearance from the black list of national crimes. These statesmen have been so ready to avail themselves of their new freedom and their long desired credit, that they entered upon negotiations with our minister at Washington to stop the slave-trade before the act of their own government was completed.

The first overt act of promise was the incident which I noticed four months ago,—the prayer for the slave offered by the chaplain at the opening of the session of Congress in December last. Though all understood the portent, few perhaps expected that within four months the prayer would be exchanged for the rejoicing words, "We thank thee that our soil is now free from slavery, and that this air is now free air, and so shall remain for ever." Yet this was the thanksgiving uttered in the Capitol on the 17th of April. The next portent was the execution of Captain Gordon, the slave-trader, on whom the President allowed the law to take its course, in spite of the most vehement remonstrances from the pro-slavery interest. The man was as fit a subject for the halter as society could produce,—a ruffian notoriously guilty of a long course of murders: but he would not have suffered death under the rule of any President but one resolved to put down the crime. We all knew what must be coming then: but we were hardly prepared for an intermediate step.

It appears that it must have been in March that Mr. Lincoln commissioned his Secretary of State to propose to our Minister a new Treaty for the repression of the Slave-trade; in which all terms should be granted which were necessary to the effectual accomplishment of the object. Mr. Seward made the proposal to Lord Lyons, who "responded warmly." None of the old difficulties were revived; no obstacles arose; and the treaty was signed by the two ministers on the 7th of April. There is an end now to the shabby evasions and the quarrelsomeness of which we have had so much reason to complain from pro-slavery administrations at Washington. There is an end to the blocking-up of the shallows and river mouths of the African coast by large American ships which caught no slaves, and allowed no smaller vessels to enter for the purpose. There is an end to the holiday-making of the American officers at the Azores for many months of the year, during which they claimed a right of watching long reaches of the coast which they left open to the slave-traders. Moreover, the Right of Search is allowed, and in consequence there is an end at once to the impunity of traffic in negroes under the American flag, and to the danger of international quarrels which has perpetually arisen from the denial of the Right of Search in a case in which it was indispensable to the prosecution of the objects of the treaty.

By the new treaty, the world was given a share in the great boon before it was legally assured to the American people themselves. Not many days, however, had the nation to wait.

It had been supposed that the Emancipation Bill would become law on the anniversary of the attack on Fort Sumter; but the Senate did not sit on Saturday the 12th. On the Sunday morning, the whole coloured population of the District appeared in the streets and roads, dressed in their best, wearing different countenances from those they were known by; for they were in high excitement, quiet as was their demeanour. They repaired to their churches, of which they have seventeen in the District, served by clergymen of their own colour. The churches were thronged; and the scene was one never to be forgotten by the white people who were present. The prayers and sermons were special, and Moses was, naturally, the patron saint of the celebration. There is no knowing or conjecturing what proportion of the people had any misgivings about what might happen between that hour and the moment of complete deliverance. Throughout the day, everything seemed bright and joyful. But it was a night of woe. The kidnappers had everything ready; and, as soon as the whites were safe in bed, they began their devilish work. They seized the strongest and best-looking of the men and women, and carried them by force into Maryland, parting parents and children, husbands and wives, with the ruthlessness which is an attribute of the slave-trader. Cries, groans and tears sounded through the whole District: and we may hope that the members of the Senate will feel bound to search out and restore the poor wretches who were disappointed of liberty by their failure to sit on the Saturday, as was expected of them. It is to be hoped that the new bondage will soon be at an end; for Maryland must follow the example already set by Delaware, of preparing to abolish slavery as a State institution. The kidnapping was done for the mere difference between the 300 dollars per head voted by Congress and the price which might be got in the Maryland market. The choicest were carried off; but, in the present state of the slave-markets, it cannot be long before the new owners will be glad to set them free. I need not say that, if all but the old, sickly, and stupid had been carried off, the event would still have been a call upon all human society to rejoice; for the continued slavery of a few hundred negroes is not for a moment to be weighed against the blessing of the territory being free ground for ever, and the national government released from the sin and disgrace of sanctioning slaveholding.

In a few hours more, the emancipation was secured, as far as Congress was concerned. It only remained for the pro-slavery party to work upon the President, to induce him to veto the Bill. The pressure was very great: so great that many believed that no elective magistrate could withstand it; but Mr. Lincoln is a man of strong determination. On the one hand, heavy bets were offered that he would veto the Bill: on the other, the citizens remembered some remarkable words of his, recently uttered, and believed that he would remain unshaken. The words were: "I

am entirely satisfied that no slave who becomes for the time free within the American lines will ever be re-enslaved. Rather than have it so, I would give up and abdicate." To remand the slaves in the District to the yoke after Congress had removed it, would be as cruel as to send Carolina slaves back to their bondage; and the man who uttered those words would not do such an act. This was true: and on the 16th, the President's signature made the Emancipation Bill law.

Throughout the Free States, there was an anxious watching for the news; and as soon as the telegrams were given out from the offices, such rejoicings began as had never before been witnessed, because no such cause of rejoicing had occurred within living memory. Among the New England homesteads there are thousands of families who cannot celebrate with joy a bloody victory: and in the towns and villages, consideration for the mourners who abound in them checks, more or less, every kind of noisy demonstration. At that time, it was told everywhere that all Illinois was in mourning, after the battle of Pittsburg Landing; and multitudes had refused to celebrate the victory, which was then supposed to be much greater than it was. But the event of the 16th of April was not only harmless, but, in the eyes of all good citizens, a national blessing without drawback: and the echoes of the northern hills were roused by salutes of a hundred guns: all along the valleys the inhabitants were brought out into the roads by the clang of all the church-bells within hearing. Presently, all work was thrown over for the day; and the people, in their Sunday best, were thronging to their churches and public halls, to hold meetings, pass resolutions, hear congratulatory speeches, or join in thanksgiving, and shout their most joyful psalms. The old people shed happy tears that they had lived to see the day; and the children, if they live a hundred years, will never forget it. There must have been a rush of thoughts in the minds of the middle-aged people. When they were young, the right of petition to Congress had been lost for a time through the attempt to obtain this very enactment. It had always been clear enough to everybody that the abolition of slavery in the District was the turning point of the destiny of the institution, and of the fate of the Republic which it imperilled; and, like innocent people, who supposed their government to be the popular system which it professed to be, the citizens of a quarter of a century ago applied themselves to government, by petition to Congress, to get rid of slavery in the District. They were put off, ridiculed, rebuked, insulted, and especially in the person of the representative who had courage to present their petitions,—the venerable ex-President Adams. One way in which they were put off must have been recalled to the minds of the survivors by a repetition of the same attempt on Mr. Lincoln, at the last moment. It was proposed to refer the matter to the inhabitants of the District. The northern citizens did not destroy their chance of success by a refusal, but insisted that, if the will of the inhabitants of the District was to decide the case, every adult inhabitant,

black and white, must have a vote upon it. If it was a question whether one portion of society should or should not buy and sell the other, the vote of one party was not to the point. In 1836, the proposal was dropped, and the petitioners were silenced. In April, 1862, the proposal is overridden by the President's contempt, after Congress had put the requisite power into his hands. He signed the Bill, and the matter is settled.

It is satisfactory to perceive how great and evident the relief is to some of the slaveholders of the District. Several refused to take any measures for selling their negroes while there was yet time, saying that they preferred taking any price for them that government might fix, and then knowing that they were free, to receiving a larger sum with the consciousness that they were still in slavery. There can be no doubt that the same feeling would be found everywhere in the Slave States, where a large proportion of the proprietors would make any reasonable sacrifice to be rid of their share in the institution which involves so much loss and disgrace. The State laws render emancipation impracticable; and a way out of the position of man-owner is all that is wanted by many thousands who, even if they were not in debt, could not rid themselves of their burden by selling their servants to any chance trader who travels to supply the markets. These metropolitan proprietors, willing and pleased to cease to be slave-owners, open a cheering prospect in other quarters.

The number of negroes released will become known, no doubt, when the Commissioners report. At present, it is mere guesswork how many have been removed in anticipation of the act. I see that 4,000 freed by the act is somebody's estimate; but I do not know what it is worth.

We can form a better judgment of what they will be like as free men and women; for we are in possession, not only of the returns of the Census of 1860, as to the condition of the free blacks in the District, but of a schedule of their property, furnished at so late a date as the 17th of last March.

Though the slavish condition of any considerable proportion of any race or class in society is incalculably depressing to the free members of that race or class, the rise in numbers and position of the free negroes of America between the Census of 1850 and that of 1860 is so great as to be pregnant with significance. In that interval, the increase of numbers was 52,454. Yet more remarkable is the improvement in their position, though any such elevation might have been thought impossible.

For many years there had been colleges in various parts of the Free States where students of that race, and of both sexes, could obtain a capital education. No doubt, the constant issue from those institutions of professional men, and of women trained as governesses and schoolmistresses, must have long operated in raising the spirit of their class; but it was after the Census of 1850 that the most impressive evidences appeared. One demonstration, which is even more important now than it was ten years ago, was against all plans for deporting the people of colour. At annual

conventions of their class, strong resolutions were passed against leaving their country on any pretence whatever. They were Americans, and in America they would remain. They did not choose either to impair the chances of their enslaved brethren by leaving them without champions of their own colour, or to be carried to a barbarous country like Africa after being brought up Americans. At the same time, the strongest exhortations were addressed to their free brethren to resist all pressure which should confine them to a low order of occupations, and to qualify themselves for every calling which the law allowed them. While such was the turn their judgment and feelings were taking, the common schools of Massachusetts were thrown open to them,—about seven years ago. It was a terrible doubt with them whether to break up their own schools or hold by what they possessed; but, under due encouragement, they made the venture; and they have had every reason to rejoice that they did so. From that day to this their children have grown up with white men's children, equal in all respects within the school enclosure, and of course in a much improved position beyond it. In the first University in the Republic, Harvard University, near Boston, students of all complexions pursue their education on equal terms; and the black and mulatto gentry issue forth to occupy the pulpit, to practise medicine and law, and to become school-masters, engineers, merchants, or whatever suits them, while the immigrant Irish are digging the canals and making the railways, and Germans and Dutch fill the menial offices and low employments which were once supposed the only field for the free blacks. If the schedule of the property holders of other districts than the metropolitan one were published, it would show how negro owners of hundreds of thousands of dollars obtain and employ their wealth, under legal disabilities which would discourage most of us. They remind one strongly of the Jews of the middle ages in their ambitious use of such means as they have. If deprived of political privileges by law in one State, and custom in another, they obtain power by association, and *esprit de corps*. If obstructed in holding land, they lend capital to landholders. If they may not command merchantmen, they own shipping. If confined to their own race for society, they provide dwellings for the proud whites. It does not appear that they either make a secret of their material successes, like the Jews of old, or brag of them, as the vanity of the debased portion of their own race would lead observers to expect. They buy handsome furniture and good pictures, and cultivate music, for their own pleasure, and from a regard to the opinion of their own people: and again, they give a plain answer when interrogated, for government purposes, about their possessions. The latest published inquiry of this kind bears date the 17th of last March. It relates to the District of Columbia, and it is therefore no rule whatever for the condition of the free people of colour anywhere north of the frontier of slavery. The lowest and poorest of the class are found in the presence of slavery, for obvious reasons; for the intelligent, respectable, and refined, while refusing to abandon their enslaved

brethren by leaving the country, remove as far as possible from the spectacle of a bondage which they cannot endure to see, because they can do nothing to relieve it. Yet, under the most discouraging circumstances, and in a district where no staple industry exists, there were, last March, 508 owners of real property, averaging 1205 dollars each. There were 1175 owners of property,—the number of males over twenty years of age being 2487. Their possessions ranged from 500 dollars to over 7000. If such are the fruits of the industry of these people in their lowest position, it is easy to believe that the wealth existing among them in the Atlantic ports is what we are told. In Philadelphia there are several black citizens who are worth several hundred thousand dollars each. As for their total numbers, they were (before this Act of Emancipation) 222,745 in the Free States, and 259,078 in the Slave States. As I have already said, their increase between the last Census and the preceding was returned as 52,454, but it was in fact much greater. We all remember the persecution of their class in 1859, when they were driven out by wholesale from most of the Slave States; or rather, the old and young were driven out, and too many of the able-bodied were seized on various pretences, and sold in the market. If those who fled to Canada and elsewhere, because they were utterly adrift, could be reckoned with the increase which remained, the sum would be much larger. We must add to it, also, the considerable emigration to Hayti, under the protection of the agency organised in concert with President Geffrard, and in prospect of the new demand for cotton, which the free coloured people have long foreseen. All these facts indicate a vigorous condition for a race so depressed, and an ascertained capability to take care of themselves.

Those who know them best are least afraid of their being a burden on the North, whenever the whole five millions become free. They will not emigrate to any considerable extent; and they will not settle in the North while there is an opening for them in the South,—which there always will be. In the South they are at present indispensable; and there is every prospect of their continuing to be so: and they love the climate. I have not space to describe the various free settlements now already prospering under the superintendence of white guardians, commissioners, and teachers; nor the military training which large numbers are receiving for garrison duty in the South. It must suffice at present that there is plenty for everybody to do; and that there is a general understanding that the schemes of deportation talked of are mere tubs to occupy the pro-slavery whale for a time. If the Colonisation Society has not deported in half a century the increase of one single year, though founded and sustained by the whole power of the slaveholders, it needs no proving that five millions cannot be removed. If they would go (which they will not), the Southern gentry could not spare them. The whole project, whether discussed by whites or blacks, is a mere convenience for gaining time, while the citizens are tending

towards an agreement. Meanwhile, the national institution of slavery is at an end; Delaware, Missouri, and Western Virginia are in full preparation for a similar deliverance; and General Hunter has effected complete emancipation over a portion of Georgia.

If it should be asked how the event of the 16th of April can be greater than that of serf emancipation in Russia (supposing the latter completed), the answer is plain. Russian serfage is not nearly so low an order of bondage as negro-slavery: it involves no slave trade, with the barbaric wars which feed that trade in Africa: and, above all, it is not an anomaly, like chattel-slavery in a democratic republic. However necessary its abolition may be to the social progress of the Russians, it has not undermined any existing liberties, nor corrupted a once high national character, as American slavery has done. There has been more mischief in five millions of American slaves than in fifty millions of Russian serfs: and, when the end of each bondage shall have arrived, the Russian people will have only to advance in their civilisation, while the Americans have to recover a fearful extent of lost ground.

The great step is taken: and they and we are now side by side as Christian nations, instead of having a bottomless gulf between us. It was a great day which closed that gulf.

FROM THE MOUNTAIN.